

TWENTY-TWO

BY
MARY ROBERTS RINEHART

Experience of the Young Nurse
Who, as Probationer, Dared to
Break the Rules to Save Life

THE Probationer was entered in the training school as N. Jane Brown.

When the man in this story opened his eyes after the wall of the warehouse dropped, N. Jane Brown was sitting beside him.

It was quite still for a moment. Then:

"My right leg is off," he said. "I'm afraid it's broken. But you still have it." She smiled.

The morphine had made him think it made him create. He lay there and invented for Jane Brown a fictitious person, who was himself.

This person, he said, was a newspaper reporter, who had been sent to report the warehouse fire. He had got too close, and a wall had come down on him.

After a time he felt that she was not as really interested as she might have been, so he introduced a love element, Mabel, suppressing her other name.

Mr. Middleton, now officially "Twenty-two," did not see Jane Brown again. And at last he inquired for her.

"The first day I was in here," he said to Miss Willoughby, "there was a little girl here without a cap. I don't know her name. But I haven't seen her since."

Miss Willoughby reflected.

"Without a cap? Then it was only one of the probationers. Probably Jane Brown."

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Rolling back toward the elevator and the terra incognita which lay beyond, he saw a sign which interfered considerably with a plan he had in mind. The sign was of tin and it said:

"No private patients allowed beyond here."

Twenty-two sat in his chair and stared at it. The plaster cast stretched out in front of him, and was covered with a grey blanket.

Far beyond, down the corridor, was somebody in a blue dress and no cap. It might be anybody, but again—

Twenty-two looked around. Over all the hospital brooded an after-luncheon peace.

Followed in sequence these events: (a) Twenty-two wheeled back to the parlor, where old Mr. Simond's cane leaned against a table, and, while engaging that gentleman in conversation, possessed himself of the cane. (b) Wheeled back to the elevator. (c) Drew cane from beneath blanket. (d) Unhooked sign with cane and corralled both under blanket. (e) Worked his way back along the forbidden territory until he came to H ward.

Jane Brown was in H ward.

"I came back on purpose to see you," said Twenty-two. "Because, that day I came in and you looked after me, you know, I must have talked a lot of nonsense."

"Morphia makes some people talk," she said, in a frightfully professional tone. "I said a lot that wasn't true."

Now that about a girl named Mabel for instance—

He stirred again, because, after all, what did it matter what he had said? And as he stirred Mr. Simond's cane fell out. It was immediately followed by the tin sign, which gradually subsided, face up, on the bare floor in a slowly diminishing series of crashes.

Jane Brown stooped and picked them both up and placed them on his lap. Then, very stern, she marched out of the ward into the corridor, and there subsided into quiet hysterics of mirth. Twenty-two followed her in the chair.

"I should think," she suggested, "that if you slipped it behind that radiator, no one would ever know about it."

Soon afterward Twenty-two squeaked back to his lonely room. He was rid of Mabel, but was still a reporter, hurt in doing his duty. He had let this go because he saw that duty was a sort of fetish with the Probationer.

That evening Jane Brown heard an unmistakable shuffling of feet in the corridor. She knew this sound, and it filled her with terror. It was the shuffling of four pairs of feet, carefully instructed not to keep step. It meant, in other words, a stretcher.

Jane Brown feverishly tore the spread off the emergency bed and drew it somewhat apart from its fellows. Then she stood back and waited.

Came in four officers from the police patrol. Came in the senior surgical interne. Came the stretcher, containing a quiet figure under a grey blanket.

In a very short time the quiet figure was on the bed, and the senior surgical interne was writing in the order book: "Prepare for operation."

Jane Brown read it.

"But I can't," she quavered. "I don't know how. I won't touch him. He's—he's bloody!"

Then she took another look at the bed and she saw—Johnny Fraser.

Now Johnny had, in his small way, played a part in the Probationer's life such as occasionally scrubbing porches or borrowing a half-dollar or being suspected of stealing the eggs from the henhouse. But that Johnny Fraser had been a wicked, smiling imp.

Here lay another Johnny Fraser, a quiet one, a Johnny of closed eyes and slow, noisy breathing.

"Why, Johnny?" said the Probationer, in a strangled voice.

The senior surgical interne was interested.

"Now him?" he said.

"He is a boy from home." She was still staring at this quiet, unimpaired figure.

"Is he going to live?" Twenty-two inquired. He could see that the ward nurse had an eye on him, and was preparing for retreat.

"O yes," said Jane Brown. "I think so, now. The interne says they have had a message from Dr. Willie. He is coming." There was a beautiful confidence in her tone.

She was frightfully tired next day. There seemed to be nothing to do for Johnny but to wait. Dr. Willie had requested no operation.

She had entirely forgotten Twenty-two. She was feeling rather worried, to tell the truth. For a staff surgeon going through the ward had stopped by Johnny's bed and examined the pupils of his eyes, and

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The senior surgical interne waved a hand toward Johnny's bed.

"Look there," he said. "You don't think that chap's getting any better, do you?"

"If," said Jane Brown, with suspicious quiet, "if you think you know more than a man who has practiced for forty years and saved more people than you ever saw, why don't you tell him so?"

Discourse between a probationer and an interne is supposed to be limited to yes, yes and nay, nay. But the circumstances were unusual.

"Tell him," exclaimed the senior surgical interne, "an be called before the executive committee and fired!"

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who was the real hit of the evening. The convalescents rocked with joy in their roller chairs.

The first assistant called to the probationer that night as she went past her door.

"Come in," she called. "I have been looking for you. I have some news for you."

Jane Brown looked small and tired and very, very young.

"We have watched you carefully," said the first assistant. "Although you are young, you have shown ability, and—you are to be accepted."

"Thank you, very much," replied Jane Brown, in a choked voice.

Before she went to bed that night Jane Brown slipped back to her ward.

He listened attentively.

"Well," he said at last, "we'll just make the staff turn in and do it. That's easy."

"But they won't. They can't."

"We can't let Johnny die, either, can we?"

THE hospital's attitude was firm. It could not interfere. It was an outside patient and an outside doctor. It was regretful—but, of course, unless the case was turned over to the staff—

He went back to the ward to tell her. But she was not surprised.

"It's hopeless," was all she said. "Everybody is right, and everybody is wrong."

It was the next day that, going to the courtyard for a breath of air, she saw a woman outside the iron gate waving to her. It was Johnny's mother, a forlorn old soul in what Jane Brown recognized as an old suit of her mother's.

"Dr. Willie bought my ticket, Miss Nellie," she said nervously. "It seems like I had to come, even if I couldn't get in. I've been waiting around most all afternoon. How is he?"

"He is resting quietly," said Jane Brown, holding herself very tense, because she wanted to scream. "He isn't suffering at all."

"Could you tell me which window he's near, Miss Nellie?"

She pointed out the window, and Johnny Fraser's mother stood, holding to the bars, peering up at it. Her lips moved, and Jane Brown knew that she was praying. At last she turned her eyes away.

"Folks have said a lot about him," she said, "but he was always a good son to me. If only he'd had a chance—I'd be right worried, Miss Nellie, if he didn't have Dr. Willie looking after him."

Jane Brown went into the building. Johnny Fraser must have his chance, somehow.

In the meantime a second case, although mild, had extended the quarantine.

By the one low light near the doorway she went back to Johnny's bed and sat down beside him. In her room other things pressed in on her. But here she saw things right.

The night nurse found her there some time later, asleep, her hunting-case watch open on Johnny's bed and her fingers still on his quiet wrist. She made no report of it.

THE probationer went to Dr. Willie the next day.

"Dr. Willie," she said, "won't you have him operated on?"

He looked up at her over his spectacles.

"Operated on? What for?"

"Well, he's not getting any better," she managed desperately. "I'm sometimes I think he'll die while we're waiting for him to get better."

"There's no fracture, child," he said gently. "If there is a clot there, na-

ture is probably better at removing it than we are. The trouble with you," he said indulgently, "is that you have come here, where they operate first and losing day by day, was Johnny Fraser."

Then, one night on the roof, Jane Brown had to refuse the senior surgical interne. He took it very hard.

"I suppose," he said with some bitterness, "that I'd have stood a better chance if I'd done as you wanted me to about that fellow in your ward, gone to the staff and raised the mischief."

"I wouldn't have married you," said Jane Brown, "but I'd have thought you were pretty much of a man."

IT was the next day that Twenty-two had his idea. Jane Brown was not enthusiastic.

"It would help to amuse them, of course, but how can you publish a newspaper without any news?" she asked.

"News! This building is full of news. I have some bits already. Listen!" He took a notebook out of his

him, too, his fine old head, the sturdy step that had brought healing and peace to a whole county. She had hurt him, she knew that. And she had done no good.

That afternoon Jane Brown broke another rule. She went to Twenty-two on her off duty, and caused a mild furor there.

"I have to talk to somebody," she said simply. "And I came to you, because you've worked on a newspaper, and you have had a lot of experience. It's a matter of ethics. But really it's a matter of life and death."

He felt most horribly humble before her. There was something so direct and childlike about her. The very way she drew a chair in front of him, and proceeded, talking rather fast, to lay the matter before him, touched him profoundly.

"You see how it is," she finished. "I can't go to the staff, and they wouldn't do anything if I did—except possibly put me out. Because a nurse really only follows orders. And—I've got to stay, if I can. And Dr. Willie doesn't believe in an operation and won't see that he's dying. And everybody at home thinks he is right because—well, he's been right a good many times."

He listened attentively.

"Well," he said at last, "we'll just make the staff turn in and do it. That's easy."

"But they won't. They can't."

"We can't let Johnny die, either, can we?"

Jane Brown's heart sank about two inches.

She went back to the ward and sat beside Johnny. But that night she went up on the roof again, and sat on the parapet. She could see, across the courtyard, the dim rectangles of her ward, and around a corner in plain view, room Twenty-two. Its occupant was sitting at the typewriter, and working hard.

The first number of the Quarantine Sentinel was a great success. It relieved the monotony, brought the different wards together, furnished laughter and gossip. Twenty-two wrote the editorials, published the papers, with the aid of a couple of convalescents, and in his leisure drew cartoons. He drew very well, but all his girls looked like Jane Brown.

The children from the children's ward distributed them, and went back from the private rooms bearing tribute of flowers and fruit. A wave of friendliness swept over every one, and engulfed particularly Twenty-two.

This was the first popularity he had ever earned, and because he valued it, he felt more and more unworthy of it.

But it kept him from seeing Jane Brown.

Through it all Johnny lived. His thin, young body was now hardly an outline under the smooth, white covering of his bed. And still she had found no way to give him his chance.

She made a last appeal to Dr. Willie, but he only shook his head gravely.

"Even if there was an operation now, Nellie," said Dr. Willie, "he could not stand it."

It was the first time that Twenty-two had known her name was Nellie.



AND ALL THE TIME FIGHTING HIS BATTLE WITH YOUTH AND VIGOR, WITH CLOSED EYES, AND LOSING IT, DAY BY DAY, WAS JOHNNY FRASER.



SUDDENLY TWENTY-TWO LIMPED ACROSS THE ROOM AND SLAMMED THE DOOR SHUT. THEN HE TURNED HIS BACK AGAINST THE DOOR.

room, she would stand in the doorway and say a little little farewell.

TWENTY-TWO's door was wide open, and he was standing in the doorway, looking out.

He was horribly excited.

"There was a sort of dreadful calm, however, about Jane Brown."

"The watchman says I have left something here."

It was clear to him at once that he meant nothing to her. It was in her voice.

"You did," he said. And tried to smile.

"Then—if I may have it—"

"I wish to heaven you could have it," he said, very rapidly. "I don't want it. It's darned miserable."

"It's—what?"

"It's an ache," he went on. "A pain. A misery." Then, seeing her beginning to put on a professional look:

"No, not that. It's a feeling. Look here," he said, "do you mind coming in and closing the door? There's a man across who's always listening."

She went in, but she did not close the door.

"What I sent for you for is this," said Twenty-two. "Are you going away?"

"I'm being sent away as soon as the quarantine is over. It's—it's perfectly right."

Suddenly Twenty-two limped across the room and slammed the door shut. Then he turned his back against the door.

"I'm going when you do," he said, in a terrible voice. "I'm going when you go, and wherever you go, I've stood all the waiting around for a glimpse of you that I'm going to stand." He glared at her. "For weeks," he said, "I've sat here in this room and listened for you, and hated to go to sleep for fear you would pass and I wouldn't be looking through that door. And now I've reached the limit."

"And I want to say this," went on Twenty-two. "I don't care whether you want me or not, you've got to have me. I'm so much in love with you that I hurt."

Jane Brown faced Twenty-two with brave eyes.

"I love you, too—so much that it hurts."

The gentleman across the hall, sitting up in bed with an angry sheen on the bell, was electrified to see, on the glass door across, the silhouette of a young lady without a cap go into the arms of a very large, masculine silhouette in a dressing gown.

Late that night Jane Brown made her way back to H ward. Johnny was there, a strange Johnny, with a bandage, but, with open eyes.

At dawn, the dawn of the day when Jane Brown was to leave the hospital, the night nurse found her there, asleep, her fingers still on Johnny's thin wrist.

She did not report it.

(Copyright, 1923.)

40,000 Words an Hour.

It was Antoine Pollak, a Hungarian, who invented a machine that it is claimed will telegraph 40,000 words an hour. The system is a combination of electricity and photography.

The machine is many times larger than the usual equipment of a telegrapher's desk, but its operation is much less complicated. In fact, it is said, an operator who is far from being an expert can develop amazing speed.

There are three parts to the Pollak station outfit. First comes the perforating machine. This is equipped with a universal keyboard similar to that of a typewriting machine. The message is typed off on this, but instead of the letters being recorded, a roll of paper like that in a stock-ticker receives perforations for each one, a combination of open-work dots and dashes. This machine is separate from the rest and therefore in the case of a long message it would be possible to have several operators